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Back at My Boat

Luke 5:1-11

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CPC 6/18/00

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[reconstructed from short sermon notes]

About a week and a half ago, I attended a conference. At the opening of the conference, the conference leader asked everyone this question" "What does God want you to want?" That is, what does God want you to want from God, as we move forward in this conference, which in part is about receiving from God that which He may want to give. Well, I immediately thought of an answer. What I wanted from God was clarity of vision for how to maneuver in the ministries at CPC. This was a no-brainer for me. But it was also my head answer. For soon after asking the question, the conference leader invited everyone to spend some time in prayer to ask God what it was that He wanted us to want. And as soon as I did, as soon as I opened myself up to prayer, I got a different answer than the one my head told gave me. The different answer was mainlined into my being from God and it took about a microsecond for me to get it.

What I was to want was that I completely surrender to Jesus. I had the overwhelming sense that I had not given over to Jesus all of my life, that I was holding back significant portions of who I am. Of course, I knew immediately that this was true, and in that knowing, I knew that this was indeed from God. So what God wanted me to want was that I give myself completely over to God. This was far more important than clarity of vision, though such clarity is important. It's just not as important as surrendering to Jesus, at least for me.

Peter was fishing all night with his friends, and he had caught nothing. Jesus came along and told him to put out into deeper water, and Peter decided to humor Him. We don't know all of what Peter knew at that moment, but my guess is that Jesus didn't have the look of a fisherman, and other fishermen would see that He didn't. Of course, we know Jesus was trained as a carpenter, so He knew less about mending nets and using nets to fish than the people He was instructing here, but Peter did as he was asked. And what happened next so completely floored Peter than he both wanted Jesus to leave and wanted to worship Him.

I love Peter. He's so like me. He wants to get away from and draw near to Jesus *at exactly the same time*. All in all, though, Peter saw something and Peter heard something that made him decide to follow Jesus. What he saw was a catch of fish that was impossible. What he heard was a call to become a fisher of people. Somehow, in the presence of Jesus, Peter sensed that something fundamental had changed. I don't think it was curiosity. I think that the Father gave to Peter a brief word of understanding, that what he saw was only the beginning, and that the opportunity before him was more momentous than any other opportunity that had ever come along.

To follow Jesus meant he leave his boat behind. He declared to Jesus that he was a sinful man. Perhaps we could also say he was a simple man. He knew the mending of nets and he knew the art of fishing. Yet, this carpenter demonstrated neither the art of nets nor the art of fishing, but was able to cause there to be caught such an abundance of fish that this fisherman knew, deep in his heart, that there was something here worth following, so he left his nets and his boat. And, I believe, he left his simple life.

When we follow, we too leave our simple lives. We become followers and we begin to enter into the kingdom of God. What is the kingdom of God? "Repent and believe in the gospel, the kingdom of God is at hand." This is what Jesus declared at the beginning of His ministry in Mark 1. The kingdom of God came with preaching, but it also came with power. It came with people becoming reconciled to their Creator-God, but it also came with demonstrations that the power of God is now manifest in the world, that every knee would bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. People were healed of various diseases. Demons were cast out. The dead were raised and breathed new life again. These were the signs of the kingdom of God that came in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. And when Peter decided to follow, he had some sense that the catch of fish was just the beginning of this power dimension of the coming of the kingdom.

It's all there for us as well. I often ask people if they believe that the Bible is God's Word. They say yes. I ask if they believe that the Bible reflects the presence and activity of demons. They say yes. I ask if they accept the Bible's notion of the reality of demons in the first century. They mostly say yes. Then I ask if those demons took early retirement. They say no. And of course those demons didn't take early retirement. The need to cast them out then is the same as the need to cast them out today. They are in our communities and in our churches. They just aren't as overt, and our 'modern' worldview obscures them from our eyes.

Yet, that's what we are called to remember - the kingdom of God has come in the person of Jesus, and He has baptized us with His Holy Spirit, whom He sent to be our comforter, and our gift-giver, when He returned to the Father. The kingdom of God isn't just in good preaching, but it is also (it has always been also) in signs and wonders, like a huge catch of fish, like prayer for healing, like a deliverance ministry from the rule of Satan over us.

But we return to our boats. We go back to the mending of nets and the repairing of our sea-worthy vessels and to what we know. We're back at our boats too much of the time. So, what I want to say is this - do what I was asked to do … ask God to tell you want to want. Pray the prayer. For me, it was surrender. For you, it may be something else. Just don't remain by your boat. Follow Him and be involved in all of the ministry He has called us to do.

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